

VISITORS ON THE HOME TEAM
Meet Juneau's foreign exchange athletes. B1.

WASTE FACILITY BREAK-IN
Police seeking culprit. A12.

SHIPWRECKS, PIRACY & WAR FEVER
A strange story from 100 years ago. Below.

Juneau's rape kit backlog: 'one of the worst' in the nation

70 percent of kits from capital city sit in storage, untested

By JAMES BROOKS
JUNEAU EMPIRE

Since April, Vanessa Nason has been trying to track rape. More specifically, the researcher and journalist with the news site MuckRock has been trying to find out what happens across the country when a police department takes physical evidence from a sexual assault or rape. Does that evidence get tested? Does it contribute to prosecution? Or does it sit on a shelf?

She's sent dozens of information requests to police departments across the country in an effort to track thousands of sexual assault evidence kits, commonly known as "rape kits."

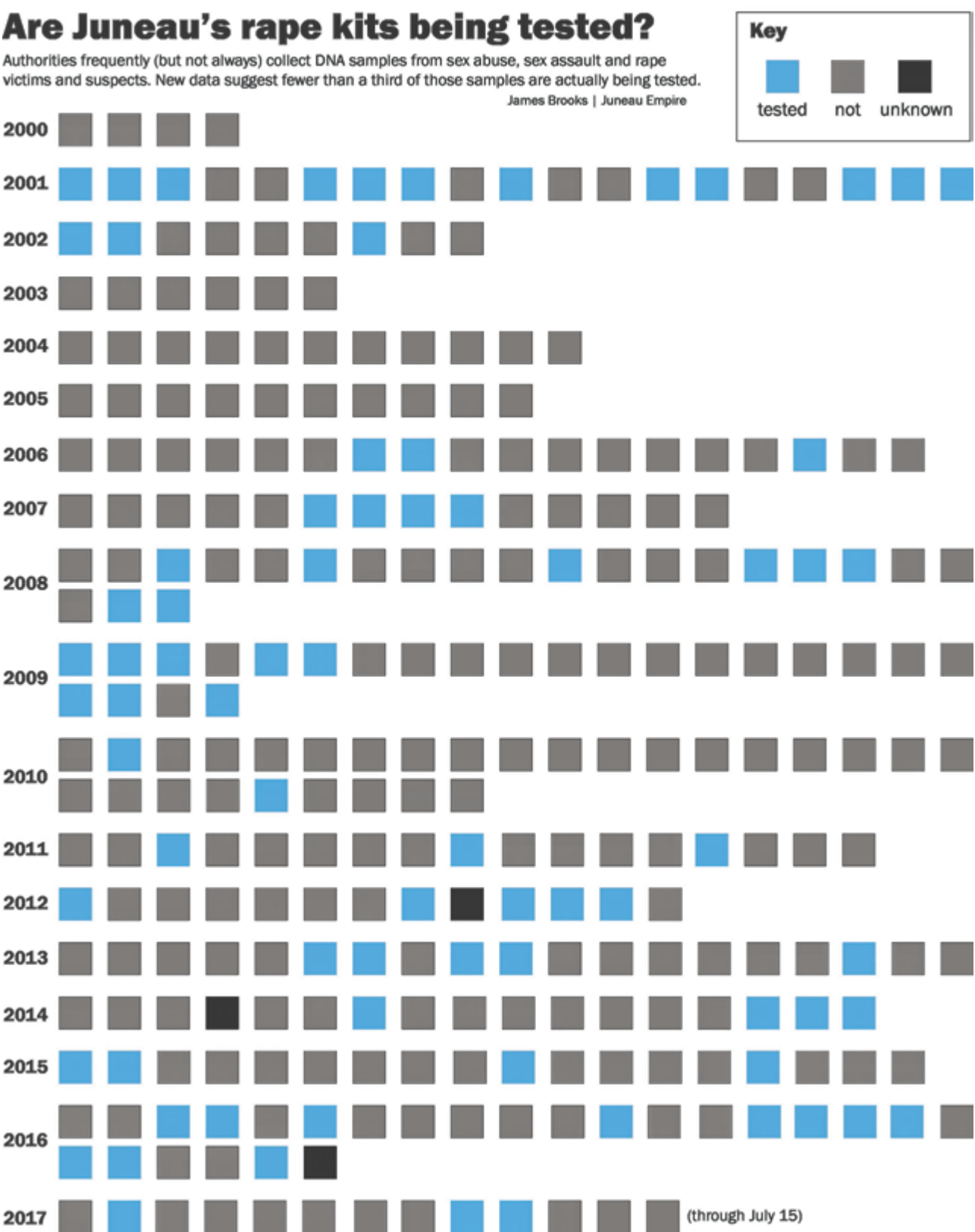
In late October, she received a response from the Juneau Police Department.

The results were astonishing.

"From the data we've seen so far, Juneau is probably the worst city when it comes to testing rape kits," she said. "Nationwide, it's one of the worst we've seen."

Between Jan. 1, 2000 and July 14 this year, Juneau police collected physical evidence from 283 sexual assaults. Only 77 were submitted for DNA testing. The remaining 206 — more than 70 percent — remain in storage.

Soon after Nason published a story about the Juneau data, the Alaska Department



ment of Public Safety published a report that counted all untested rape kits in police custody within the 49th state. It found 3,484 — more per capita than any other state in the country, according to the counting of A Joyful Heart Foundation, which tracks such figures.

If Nason ranked Juneau as the worst in her memory, the state's report found still worse.

Anchorage has one untested kit for every 164 residents. In Juneau, it's one for every 160 residents. In Nome, where 83 kits have gone untested, it's one for every 46 residents.

Deputy Attorney General Rob Henderson, head of the criminal section of the Alaska Department of Law, said by phone that there are plenty

SEE RAPE | Page A12

Global movement coming to Juneau this week

JUNEAU EMPIRE

The holiday season has begun in Juneau, with the annual shopping rush in full swing. Local organizations are joining forces with others around the world to help remind people that the season is about more than shopping.

Giving Tuesday is a follow-up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday, seeking to inspire people to collaborate in giving back in their communities. The movement aims to show the collective power of individuals and that every act of generosity counts.

REACH, Inc. and the Canvas Art Gallery are joining the movement, pledging to raise a minimum of \$3,000 for a matching grant from the Skaggs Foundation. For any donation of \$100 or more to REACH, the Skaggs Foundation will match the donation. People can go to www.reachak.org/contribute to donate.

Donations to REACH would go to various services that support those living with developmental and intellectual disabilities. REACH serves about 400 children and adults, providing youth programs, community inclusion programs, independent housing, employment opportunities and more. The Canvas Art Gallery & Studio offers exhibitions, courses and more, promoting an inclusive arts community.

Organizations in nearly 100 countries are taking part in Giving Tuesday, according to the movement's website. Other Juneau organizations listed on the Giving Tuesday site include the Healing Hand Foundation, Sealaska Heritage Institute, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), Southeast Alaska Independent Living, United Way of Southeast Alaska, and Young

Shipwrecks, piracy & war fever

The strange story of mayhem on the Alaska seas 100 years ago

By ALEX MCCARTHY
JUNEAU EMPIRE

The northern seas were a dangerous place in 1917. In the northern Atlantic, German submarines lurked beneath the waves and sunk ships into icy waters as World War I raged on.

In the waters around Alaska, all kinds of hazards awaited sailors. Blistering winds tossed boats on the waves, hidden reefs scraped against submerged hulls and blinding snowstorms led boats astray.

While the headlines atop the pages of Alaska newspapers at the

time gave updates of war on the other side of the world, headlines near the bottom of the page told the stories of a tumultuous month in the waters of Southeast Alaska.

November of 1917 was a month of piracy, rescue, courtroom drama and a dash of war paranoia.

Thirty-six hours of mayhem

A well known Gold Rush vessel, the wooden steamer *Al-Ki*, was sailing from Juneau to Sitka when it ran aground during a storm on Nov. 1, 1917 near Point Augusta, on Chicagof Is-

land about 26 miles southwest of Juneau.

According to a report from the *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, those aboard the *Al-Ki* quickly abandoned ship, leaving most of their baggage and valuables on board. Soon after the wreck, the sailors caught sight of an approaching vessel.

As the ship drifted closer, it came into clearer view. It was a 130-foot long, steel-hulled Canadian fishing vessel called the *Manhattan*. The crew of about 35 was heading to the Gulf of Alaska, as fishing was a year-round venture in those days.

Any hope that the



COURTESY PHOTO | ALASKA STATE LIBRARY HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS ASL-P425-11-03

The steamship *Mariposa* (pictured) rescued two shipwrecked crews in November 1917, only to wreck just days later.

sailors of the *Al-Ki* had of being rescued by this band of halibut fishermen quickly disappeared. As soon as they saw that the *Al-Ki* was abandoned, the crew of the *Manhattan* hopped aboard and began treating the boat like a rock band treats a hotel room.

"Trunks were hacked open with axes, valuable baggage slit with knives and the contents scattered everywhere," said a crew member. "The contents of the trunks were scattered all over the place."

SEE SHIP | Page A9

LOST:

Continued from Page A9

For those in Juneau, that fever seemed to have abated their anger at the 35 Canadian fishermen who remained in jail. The *Manhattan* crew members had been remarkably unlucky during their trip through Alaska’s seas — from uncharted rocks to enraged brown bears to being stuck in jail — but they did get very fortunate in one important sense.

The evidence that was presented at trial, according to Juneau District Attorney Smiser, wasn’t enough to convict the crew members. News of Smiser dismissing the trial only took up one paragraph in the Jan. 13, 1918 edition of the *Dispatch*.

The crew members of the *Manhattan*, who were at the mercy of the Alaska weather and wildlife for their whole bizarre journey, were bailed out in the end, as the evidence of their crime was erased by the ever-treacherous waters and shore of the Alaska coast.

• Contact reporter Alex McCarthy at 523-2271 or alex.mccarthy@juneauempire.com. Michael Burwell, co-author of “Shipwrecks of the Alaskan Shelf and Shore,” contributed research to this article.

References

- “Shipwrecks of the Alaskan Shelf and Shore,” by Evert E. Tornfelt and Michael Burwell
- “Land of Ocean Mists,” by Francis E. Caldwell
- “Can’t Find Fish Boat,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Nov. 11, 1917
- “Manhattan’s Crew Must Face Charge,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Nov. 17, 1917
- “Mariposa’s Commander Had Hunch,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Nov. 20, 1917
- “Manhattan Case Today,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Nov. 22, 1917
- “Manhattan Case Will End Today,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Nov. 23, 1917
- “Wrecking of Ships Regarded Suspicious,” *International News Service*, Nov. 27, 1917
- “Al-Ki Looting Case to be Finally Dismissed,” *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, Jan. 13, 1918



The *Al-Ki* sits immobile on Nov. 1, 1917. The boat was ransacked soon afterward by fishermen-turned-pirates aboard the fishing vessel *Manhattan*.

RAPE:

Continued from Page A1

of reasons why a kit might not be tested.

“A (rape kit) is helpful, but depending upon the actual issue, it may not be determinative,” he said.

If both victim and alleged attacker agree they had sex but disagree whether that sex was consensual, physical evidence can’t help. If the prosecutor declines to take the case, or the victim decides to not press charges, the kit probably won’t be tested.

Victim advocates say that’s a bad strategy. They argue that if all kits are tested, police have a better chance to identify serial rapists.

In 2011, Ohio’s attorney general started an effort to test that state’s 14,000 untested rape kits. In the six years since that effort started, Ohio tested more than 6,800 kits and identified 436 serial rapists in Cleveland’s Cuyahoga County alone. One serial

rapist was linked to 17 assaults.

“Someone who commits this crime in Juneau can commit this crime in Massachusetts or Texas,” Nason explained. “It very often connects people to multiple crimes and can connect people to future crimes, too.”

Rep. Geran Tarr, D-Anchorage, was the author of a legislative amendment that resulted in the statewide report earlier this month. She said now that the state knows how big its problem is, it can figure out how to fix it.

“You need a starting place to understand the extent of that problem,” she said. “Now that we have that number ... we know what the remaining amount will be and figure out how to test those using state dollars.”

It’s not likely to be cheap. The state report estimates that if all new sexual assault kits were tested, it would cost \$454,000 per year. Those are just new kits, however. Clearing the backlog would require \$2.2 million to \$3 million and several years. The state

would have to hire several new workers at the state crime lab or contract the testing out to private labs.

The state has already been awarded federal grants to test kits possessed by the Alaska State Troopers, and money to study why some kits are tested while others are not.

Only 375 of the 764 trooper-held kits will be tested under that grant, however, and competition for federal grant money has become intense as other states ramp up their own testing programs and a cost-cutting Congress prepares to reduce funding.

Deputy Chief David Campbell of the Juneau Police Department said JPD has not yet attempted to pursue grants for its backlog. Using state estimates, Juneau’s backlog would cost as much as \$309,000 to erase, and help doesn’t seem likely from the state.

Alaska is facing a \$2.7 billion annual budget shortfall, and it has already cut funding for public safety programs as part of an effort to

“[A rape kit] very often connects people to multiple crimes and can connect people to future crimes, too”
VANESSA NASON
Researcher and Journalist

reduce that deficit.

In the meantime, the state is changing some procedures: Police departments are now required to send all rape kits to the state crime lab in Anchorage for collective storage and tracking. Campbell said Juneau started that practice Nov. 1.

Despite the fiscal obstacles facing any effort to reduce the backlog, Tarr said she intends to push the Legislature to reduce or eliminate the backlog.

“I think it should be a near-term priority for sure,” she said.

• Contact reporter James Brooks at james.k.brooks@juneauempire.com or call 523-2258.

Police seeking culprit of waste facility break-in

An unsolved break-in at a local wastewater treatment building is still causing a stink with the Juneau Police Department.

At 9:40 a.m. Oct. 24, an unknown burglar (or burglars) broke into a wastewater treatment building on Egan Drive. The suspect or suspects used a tool to break the door, according to the police report. Nothing else about the suspect or suspects is known, except that various testing items worth an estimated \$602 were stolen from inside.

Anybody with information is encouraged to call Juneau Crime Line at 523-7700 or JPD at 500-0600, or go to www.juneaucrimeline.com. Crime Line is a nonprofit organization that aids police agencies in investigations. Tipsters are guaranteed anonymity and could be eligible for a reward.



On Sale Now!
At the Juneau Empire & Hearthside Books

LIMITED EDITION

\$29.95

FAMILY KEEPSAKE

Photos submitted by community members provide a personal look at the history of Alaska’s Capital City.